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AN ADDRESS

TO

Christians throughout the World.

BY A

CONVENTION OF MINISTERS,

ASSEMBLED AT RICHMOND, VA., APRIL, 1863.

PHILADELPHIA.
1863.

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TO

CHRISTIANS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN:—In the name of our holy Christianity we address you in this form, respecting matters of great interest to us, which we believe deeply concern the cause of our Blessed Master, and to which we invoke your serious attention.

We speak not in the spirit of controversy, not by political inspiration, but as servants of the Most High God, we speak the “truth in love,” concerning things which make for peace.

In the midst of war—surrounded by scenes that pain the souls of all good men—deploring the evils which are inseparable from national contention—we feel most deeply impressed by the conviction that, for our own sake, for the sake of our posterity, for the sake of humanity, for the sake of the truth, and above all for the sake of our Redeemer’s kingdom, it behooves us to testify of certain things in our beloved land which seem neither to be understood nor appreciated by our enemies, nor yet clearly appreciated by Christians of other nations.

We put forth this address, after much prayer, solemnly invoking the blessing of Almighty God, and committing what we say to that Providence by which we trust we are directed, and by whose authority and power the governments of the earth stand or fall. If we were moved to make this address

by any fears of the final issue of the war in which our country is now engaged, by any inclination to meddle with political questions, by any desire to resume controversy in respect to matters which have been referred to the arbitration of the sword; if, indeed, anything that compromised the simplicity, dignity and purity of Christian duty moved us to issue this address, we should deserve to have it despised by you, and could hope for no blessing of God to rest upon it. But for all we say in the following declarations, we are willing to be judged by succeeding generations, and to answer in that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known.

We do not propose to discuss the causes of the war. They are matters of recent history, easily known and read of all men. To discuss them would obviously involve much more than, as Christian ministers, we feel it our province to argue. We submit for your consideration, as the first point of our testimony and ground of protest:

That the war waged against our people, in principle and in fact, proposes to achieve that which, in the nature of the case, it is impossible to accomplish by violence.

The war proposes the restoration of the Union. We can rationally suppose a war for conquest, or to expel an invader, or to compel respect for stipulations of peace and international intercourse which have been violated; but how measures of violence can reunite independent States, restore their broken fellowship, reëstablish equality of representative rights, or coerce a people to brotherly kindness, unity and devotion to each other, is utterly beyond our conception.

But if our enemies be disingenuous in their professions; if they fight not to recover seceded States, but to subjugate them, what promise do men find in the numbers, intelligence, courage, resources and moral energies of the millions who inhabit the Confederate States, that such a people can ever become profitable or happy, as subordinate to mere military force? If subjugation, therefore, were possible, is it desirable? Would the United States gain anything? Would Christian civilization gain anything? Said a great British

statesman, in 1775, when arguing in favor of adopting conciliatory measures in respect to the revolted colonies of America—colonies, not seceding States—that were in actual rebellion against their sovereign: “The use of force is but temporary. It may subdue for a moment, but it does not remove the necessity for subduing again; and a nation is not governed which is perpetually to be conquered. My next objection is its uncertainty. Terror is not always the effect of force, and an armament is not a victory. * * * * *

A farther objection is that you impair the object by your very endeavors to preserve it. The thing you fought for is not the thing you recover.” Christian brethren, could the hand of violence win you to desire fellowship with a people while it destroyed your peace, polluted your sanctuaries, invaded the sacred precincts of your homes, robbed you of your property, slaughtered your noble sons, clothed your daughters in grief, filled your land with sorrow, and employed its utmost strength to reduce your country to the degradation of a subjugated province? Would it not rather animate you to prefer death—honorable death—the patriot’s alternative, the Christian’s martyrdom?

As an excuse for violence, our enemies charge that the Confederate States have attempted to overthrow “*the best Government on earth*,” and call us “traitors,” “rebels.” We deny the charge, and as to the epithets, if they defined our position, under the circumstances we should glory in them as do the people of God persecuted for truth and conscience’ sake. But we regard such terms as gratuitously assuming the very point at issue. If employed sincerely, we will not complain; but we are persuaded that many have uttered these expressions, under the influence of resentful feelings, who would not otherwise assert the political doctrines they imply. We are not disposed to engage in angry retort, and only mention these things to show that we appreciate them. It will appear singular, when men reflect upon it, that so many intelligent and Christian people should desire to withdraw from “*the best government on earth*.” And we need

not discuss the kindness of those who so generously propose to confer on us, by *force of arms*, "*the best government.*" No attempt has been made to overthrow the government of the United States, unless by the fanatical party which now administers its affairs. The South never entertained such an idea. If that government fall for lack of Southern support, let men discriminate between the downfall of an oppression when the oppressed have escaped, and a wanton effort to break up a good government. So Pharaoh fell, but not by the hand of Israel. The dismemberment of the Union by secession was not a blow at the government. It was for our own deliverance. It was an election of the people, only hastened, and rendered in some cases imperative, by the violent movements of the Executive of the United States. Virginia may be referred to as an illustration. The State was not willing to secede hastily; but the demand of President Lincoln that she furnish troops to fight her sister States ended all hesitation. At once she took position with the Confederacy, preferring to battle in defence of liberty rather than, in opposition to all her principles, to invade or suffer the invasion of the South. So far, therefore, from desiring to destroy the United States government, the great object of those States which *first* seceded was to secure their own rights and their tranquillity; while the *immediate* object of the States which *last* seceded was to place themselves as barriers in the way of a fanatical administration and if possible, stay the bloody effort to coerce independent States to remain in the Union, when their constitutional rights would not be respected, and when the very purpose to coerce them showed a readiness to sacrifice the lives of citizens to the demands of sectional hostility. The South would never vote in favor of annexing or retaining a Northern State by force of arms. Instead, therefore, of waging war for the overthrow of the United States, the Confederate States simply defend themselves.

The war is forced upon us. We have always desired peace. After a conflict of opinions between the North and the South, in Church and State, of more than thirty years, growing

more bitter and painful daily, we withdraw from them to secure peace—they send troops to compel us into reunion! Our proposition was peaceable separation, saying, “we are *actually* divided, our *nominal* union is only a platform in strife.” The answer is a call for *seventy-five thousand* troops to force submission to a government whose character, in the judgment of the South, had been sacrificed to sectionalism. From the speech of Mr. Burke, already referred to, the following language may be quoted as not inappropriate to our position in respect to peace: “The proposition is peace. Not peace through the medium of war; not peace to be hunted through the labyrinth of intricate and endless negotiation; not peace to arise out of universal discord, fomented from principle, in all parts of the empire; not peace to depend on the judicial determination of perplexing questions, or the precise marking of the shadowy boundaries of a complex government. It is simple peace, sought in the spirit of peace and laid in principles purely pacific.” Such a proposition of peace was clearly the appropriate duty of a Christian people. The South can point out on the pages of history the names, and refer to the earnest and repeated efforts of her commissioners of peace. But our foes preferred war—violence—and by violence the end they aimed at was unattainable, as the purpose was unworthy of a Christian nation. *Against this violence*, upon principle, and in the light of all the facts of the case, we, as servants of God and ministers of peace, testify and solemnly protest. The second general point which we submit for your Christian consideration is:

The separation of the Southern States is universally regarded by our people as final, and the formation of the Confederate States government as a fixed fact, promising in no respect a restoration of the former Union.

Politically and ecclesiastically the line has been drawn between North and South. It has been done distinctly, deliberately, finally, and in most solemn form. The Confederacy claims to possess all the conditions and essential characteristics of an independent government. Our institutions, habits,

tastes, pursuits and religion suggest no wish for reconstruction of the Union. We regard the Confederacy, in the wise providence of the Almighty, as the result of causes which render its independent existence a moral and political necessity, and its final and future independence of the United States not a matter that admits of the slightest doubt.

Among all the indefensible acts growing out of the inexcusable war waged against us, we will refer to one especially, in regard to which, for obvious reasons, we would speak, and as becometh us, plainly and earnestly :

The recent proclamation of the President of the United States, seeking the emancipation of the slaves of the South, is, in our judgment, a suitable occasion for solemn protest on the part of the people of God throughout the world.

First, upon the hypothesis that the proclamation could be carried out in its design, we have no language to describe the bloody tragedy that would appal humanity. Christian sensibilities recoil from the vision of a struggle that would inevitably lead to the slaughter of tens of thousands of poor deluded insurrectionists! Suppose their owners suffered; in the nature of things the slaves would suffer infinitely more. Make it absolutely necessary for the public safety that the slaves be slaughtered, and he who should write the history of that event would record the darkest chapter of human woe yet written.

But, *secondly*, suppose the proclamation—as indeed we esteem it in the South—a mere political document, devised to win favor among the most fanatical of the Northern people, uttering nothing that has not already been attempted practically, but in vain, by the United States; suppose it to be worth no more than the paper on which its bold iniquity is traced, nevertheless, it is an avowal of a principle, the declaration of a wish, the deliberate attempt of the chief magistrate of a nation to do that which, as a measure of war, must be repugnant to civilization, and which we calmly denounce as worthy of universal reprobation, and against which Christians in the name of humanity and religion ought to protest. What

shall sound Christianity say to that one-idea philanthropy which, in the name of an *imaginary* good, in blind fury rushes upon a thousand *unquestionable* evils? If it were the time for such an argument, we should not fear the issue of a full discussion of this whole question of slavery.

We fear no investigation, we decline no debate; but we would not, at an hour like this and in an address which is chiefly a protest, invoke the spirit of controversy. We content ourselves with what we regard as infinitely more solemn; we stand before the world, while war silences the voices of disputants, and men in deadly contention wrestle in fields of blood, protesting against the crimes that, in the name of liberty and philanthropy, are attempted! Let it go forth from our lips while we live; let it be recorded of us when we are dead, that we—ministers of our Lord Jesus Christ, and members of his holy Church, with our hands upon the Bible, at once the sacred chart of our liberties and the foundation of our faith, call heaven and earth to record that, in the name of Him whose we are and whom we serve, we protest! No description we can give of this measure of the Executive of the United States, even though indignation alone inspired us to utter it, would exaggerate what we regard as an unholy infatuation, a ruthless persecution, a cruel and shameful device, adding severity and bitterness to a wicked and reckless war.

When it is remembered that, in the name of a "*military necessity*" this new measure was adopted, we may pass by the concession of weakness implied in this fact, and content ourselves with calling attention to the *immorality* of a necessity created by a needless war of invasion. "*Military necessity*" an excuse not for self defence—not for self-preservation—but for violating the rules of civilized warfare, and attempting a barbarity. If "*military necessity*" be the inspiration to attempt emancipation, how shall men praise it as philanthropy? Are other nations uninterested in such conduct? Proclaim the right first to invade and subjugate independent States, exhaust all resources, and then avow the

principle of "military necessity" as an excuse to add severity to a wrong, as a plea upon which to project a scheme violative of every manly, honorable and Christian sentiment! Suppose an invader happens to be too weak to conquer upon any other plan, has he therefore the right to proclaim that poison and the indiscriminate slaughter of women and children shall be his legal method? The common cause of humanity and the common hope of Christian civilization, as they appeal to every nation, cry out against this wretched subterfuge. If the "military necessity" of *weakness* may righteously adopt any measure that an invader's ingenuity can invent, or his malice suggest, what laws, what principles of justice and equity shall nations at war respect? At one time the world is told that "the rebellion is weak and will be crushed out in sixty days;" at another, "Union men abound in the South, and will welcome the United States troops as deliverers;" and *now* the invader is so hopeless of his task that it is a "military necessity" that he obtain the help of slaves?

May it not pertinently be asked what that is creditable to this invasion, ought men to believe, and to what end is this deceitful war waged?

When this last resort, like all the enemy's preceding schemes, shall signally fail, as it certainly will, to achieve the ruin of the South, what is promised? Nothing but war! cruel, relentless, desperate war! Because the President, by his scheme, violates the Constitution, we might condemn him; though the constitutionality of his acts be less important to us than to the people over whom he presides: because he has violated his word, his *special promise*, and even his solemn oath of office, we might abhor his act; though that is a matter which may chiefly concern his conscientiousness, and illustrate the character of that officer whom Southerners refused to salute as their President: because of the diabolical *mischief intended* we might, in the name of heaven, indignantly denounce his proclamation; though no weapon formed against us be, practically, more harmless. But these are not the considerations which move us to protest; we solemnly protest

because, under the guise of philanthropy and the pretext of doing good, he would seek the approbation of mankind upon a war that promises to humanity only evil and that continually. Let philanthropists observe, even according to its own terms, this measure is in no proper sense an act of mercy to the slave, but of malice toward the master. It provides for freeing *only the slaves of those who fight* against the United States. The effort is not to relieve that government of slavery, where the philanthropy has full opportunity for displaying its generosity, and the power to exercise it in respect to slavery, if it exist at all, can be indulged; but the effort is simply to invoke slavery as an agent against the South, reckless of the consequences to the slaves themselves. Shall a pretext at once so weak and so base mislead intelligent men, and make them imagine that Abraham Lincoln is a philanthropist? His position ought to be offensive to every sincere abolitionist, as well as disgusting to every sincere friend of the slave, of every shade of opinion on the question of slavery. How does it affect the cause of the Confederacy? If to awaken a deeper resentment than ever inflamed the people of the South before; if to quench the last sentiment of respect that lingered in their breasts for the United States government; if to unite them more resolutely than ever, and to make it to the individual interest of every person in the bounds of the Confederacy to sustain and strengthen it with every dollar and every arm, and every prayer, and every energy of manly virtue and Christian encouragement—be to advance the invader's interest and give him hope of success, then has the proclamation furnished him opportunity of congratulating himself.

We submit further: *That the war against the Confederate States has achieved no good result, and we find nothing in the present state of the struggle that gives promise of the United States accomplishing any good by its continuance.* Though hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost, and many millions of treasure spent: though a vast amount of valuable property has been destroyed, and numbers of once happy homes made desolate: though cities and towns have been

temporarily captured, and aged men and helpless women and children have suffered such things as it were even a shame to speak of plainly: though sanctuaries have been desecrated, and ministers of God been dragged from sacred altars to loathsome prisons: though slaves have been instigated to insurrection, and every measure has been adopted that the ingenuity of the enemy could devise or his ample resources afford by sea and by land: yet we aver, without fear of contradiction, that the only possession which the United States hold in the Confederate States is the ground on which United States troops pitch their tents; and that whenever those troops withdraw from a given locality in our territory, the people resident therein testify a warmer devotion to the Confederate cause than even before their soil was invaded. Nothing is therefore conquered—no part of the country is subdued; the civil jurisdiction of the United States, the real test of their success, *has not been established by any force of arms*. Where such civil jurisdiction exists at all along the border, it has existed all the while, was not obtained by force, and is not the fruit of conquest. This fact is admitted by our enemies themselves.

It is worthy of special notice, that notwithstanding the gigantic exertions of the United States, they have not been able to secure the return of a single county, or section of a county, much less a single State that has seceded. No civil order and peace spring up in the track of their armies. All in front of them is resolute resistance, and behind them when they have entered our territory, is a deep, uncompromising opposition, over which only military force can for a moment be trusted. Thus the civilized world is called upon to observe an invasion which has lasted for nearly two years, and achieved nothing but cruelty. Before it a people ready to die, but neither ready to submit, nor weak enough to be conquered; and for its gloomy prospect an interminable war, growing more bitter and unfeeling every day, because more hopeless to them that by it have sought things impossible as well as unrighteous. In the name of the great Prince of

Peace, has Christianity, has civilization, nothing to say to such an awful tragedy? Such is the war for the *Union*! Yet every day our foes are deepening and widening that river of blood which divides us from them forever!

The only change of opinion among our people since the beginning of the war, that is of material importance to the final issue, has been the change from all lingering attachment to the former Union to a more sacred and reliable devotion to the Confederate government. The sentiments of the people are not alterable in any other respects by force of arms. If the whole country were occupied by United States troops, it would merely exhibit a military despotism, against which the people would struggle in perpetual revolutionary effort while any Southrons remained alive. Extermination of the inhabitants could alone realize civil possession of their soil. Subjugation is therefore clearly impossible. Is extermination desired by Christians?

The moral and religious interests of the South ought to be appreciated by Christians of all nations.

These interests have realized certainly no benefit from the war. We are aware that in respect to the moral aspects of the question of slavery, we differ from those who conceive of emancipation as a measure of benevolence, and on that account we suffer much reproach which we are conscious of not deserving. With all the facts of the system of slavery in its practical operations before us, "as eye-witnesses and ministers of the word, having had perfect understanding of all things" on this subject of which we speak, we may surely claim respect for our opinions and statements. Most of us have grown up from childhood among the slaves; all of us have preached to and taught them the word of life; have administered to them the ordinances of the Christian Church; sincerely love them as souls for whom Christ died; we go among them freely and know them in health and sickness, in labor and rest, from infancy to old age. We are familiar with their physical and moral condition, and alive to all their interests; and we testify in the sight of God, that the rela-

tion of master and slave among us, however we may deplore abuses in this, as in other relations of mankind, is not incompatible with our holy Christianity, and that the presence of the Africans in our land is an occasion of gratitude on their behalf, before God; seeing that thereby Divine Providence has brought them where missionaries of the cross may freely proclaim to them the word of salvation, and the work is not interrupted by agitating fanaticism. The South has done more than any people on earth for the Christianization of the African race. The condition of the slave here is not wretched, as Northern fictions would have men believe, but prosperous and happy, and would have been yet more so but for the mistaken zeal of the abolitionists. Can emancipation obtain for them a better portion? The practicable plan for benefitting the African race must be the Providential plan—the Scriptural plan. We adopt that plan in the South, and while the States would seek by wholesome legislation to regard the interest of master and slave, we, as ministers, would preach the word to both as we are commanded of God. This war has not benefitted the slaves. Those that have been encouraged or compelled by the enemy to leave their masters, have gone, and we aver can go, to no state of society that offers them any better things than they have at home, either in respect to their temporal or eternal welfare. We regard abolitionism as an interference with the plans of Divine Providence. It has not the signs of the Lord's blessing. It is a fanaticism which puts forth no good fruit; instead of blessing, it has brought forth cursing; instead of love, hatred; instead of life, death; bitterness, and sorrow, and pain, and infidelity, and moral degeneracy follow its labors. We remember how the apostle has taught the minister of Jesus upon this subject, saying: "Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honor that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren; but rather do them service because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the bene-

fit. *These things teach and exhort.* If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself."

This is what we teach, and obedient to the last verse of the text, from men that "teach otherwise"—hoping for peace—we "withdraw" ourselves.

The Christians of the South, we claim, are pious, intelligent and liberal. Their pastoral and missionary works have points of peculiar interest. There are hundreds of thousands here, both white and colored, who are not strangers to the blood that bought them. We rejoice that the great Head of the Church has not despised us. We desire, as much as in us lieth, to live peaceably with all men, and though reviled, to revile not again.

Much harm has been done to the religious enterprises of the Church by the war: we will not tire you by enumerating particulars. We thank God for the patient faith and fortitude of our people during these days of trial.

Our soldiers were before the war our fellow citizens, and many of them are of the household of faith, who have carried to the camp so much of the leaven of Christianity, that amid all the demoralizing influence of army life, the good work of salvation has gone forward there.

Our President, some of our most influential statesmen, our commanding general, and an unusual proportion of the principal generals, as well as scores of other officers, are prominent and we believe consistent members of the Church. Thousands of our soldiers are men of prayer. We regard our success in the war as due to divine mercy, and our government and people have recognized the hand of God in the formal and humble celebration of his goodness. We have no

fear in regard to the future. If the war continues for years, we believe God's grace sufficient for us.

In conclusion, we ask for ourselves, our churches, our country, the devout prayers of all God's people—"the will of the Lord be done."

Christian brethren, think on these things and let your answer to our address be the voice of an enlightened Christian sentiment going forth from you against war, against persecution for conscience' sake, against the ravaging of the Church of God by fanatical invasion. But if we speak to you in vain, nevertheless we have not spoken in vain in the sight of God: for we have proclaimed the truth—we have testified in behalf of Christian civilization—we have invoked charity—we have filed our solemn protest against a cruel and useless war. And our children shall read it and honor our spirit, though in much feebleness we may have borne our testimony.

"Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." We desire to "follow after charity;" and "as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

SIGNATURES TO THE ADDRESS.

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NOTES.

1. In publishing the foregoing Address, it is proper to declare explicitly, that its origin was from no political source whatever, but from a conference of Ministers of the Gospel in the city of Richmond.

The signatures are confined to this class because it was believed that, on the points presented, the testimony of men holding this office might be received with less prejudice than that of any other. These signatures might have been indefinitely increased. Only a limited number of names—much less than at first intended—was solicited, and as they are still coming in, some will probably be received too late for insertion. Those appended represent, more or less fully, every accessible section of the Confederacy, and nearly every denomination of Christians. They are ample for the chief objects intended, namely, to bear witness to the Christian world that the representations here made concerning the public sentiment of the South are true, and to carry a solemn protest against the continuance of this fruitless and unrighteous war.

2. From the best sources of information, it is ascertained that the whole number of communicants of the Christian Churches in the Confederate States, is about two millions and fifty thousand.

Of these the number of white communicants is about *one million five hundred and fifty thousand*. Supposing the total white population to be *eight millions*, and one half that number to be over eighteen years of age, a little more than *one-third* of the adult population are members of the Church of Christ.

The number of colored communicants is about *five hundred thousand*. Assuming the colored population to be four millions, there would be, upon the same method of computation, *one-fourth* of the adult population in communion with the Church of Christ. Thus has God blessed us in gathering into His Church from the children of Africa, more than twice as many as are reported from all the converts in the Protestant Missions throughout the heathen world.

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